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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the process of identity formation as related to adolescents' level of moral development, race, sex, and family configuration. Ego identity was operationalized into four identity statuses based on an adolescent's reported degree of exploration and goal commitment in the areas of occupation, religion, politics, and philosophy (ideological identity) and in the areas of friendship, dating, sex roles, and recreation (interpersonal identity). People with the status of "identity achievement" have experienced a crisis, resolved it successfully, and are pursuing self-chosen goals. Individuals of "foreclosure" status also have an identity, but it is parentally or societally chosen. People classified as "identity diffused" may or may not have experienced a crisis, and are not pursuing any goals. The fourth status, "moratorium," includes those individuals who are actually in crisis and have goals that are present but vague. Subjects were 288 ninth grade students (the entire class) from a small southeastern town, who completed the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status - Final Revision and the Sociomoral Reflection Objective Measure. School records provided demographic data, and a student checklist indicated family configuration. Ideological identity was related to sex, race, and family configuration, but not to level of moral reasoning. No significant associations were found for interpersonal identity. (KS)

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An Exploration of the Process of Ideological Identity Formation in Young Rural Adolescents

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Abstract

This research is from the third year of a six-year longitudinal study , the purpose of which is to investigate psychosocial and demographic factors associated with problem behaviors among adolescents. The specific aim of the present analysis was to explore the process of identity formation as related to adolescents' level of moral development, race, sex, and family configuration. Subjects were 288 ninth-graders from a small southeastern town. Ideological identity was found to be related to sex of subject, race of subject, and family configuration, but not to level of moral reasoning. No significant associations were found for interpersonal identity.

An Exploration of the Process of Ideological Identity Formation in Young Rural Adolescents

The formation of a stable identity is one of the chief developmental tasks of adolescents. Erikson (1963; 1968) wrote eloquently of the need for young people approaching adulthood to establish for themselves, both internally and in relation to their culture, clear goals and positions in two areas: vocation and ideology. Building on Erikson's theoretical foundation, Marcia (1966; 1980) sought to operationalize the notion of ego identity by conducting intensive interviews with individuals and then assigning them to one of four identity statuses, based on their reported degree of exploration and commitment in the areas of occupation, religion, and politics. The four statuses are conceptualized in terms of the presence or absence of crisis (a decision-making period) and commitment (extent of personal investment) to goals in each area. Those persons having the status of identity achievement have experienced a crisis, resolved it successfully, and are pursuing self-chosen goals. Individuals of foreclosure status also have an identity. However, they have not passed through a crisis; and, although goals are being pursued, they are parentally or societally chosen. People classed as identity diffused may or may not have experienced a crisis, and are not pursuing any goals. The fourth status, moratorium, includes those individuals who are actually in crisis, who have goals that are present, but vague

(Marcia, 1980). More recent efforts have focused on extending the concept of identity statuses into the interpersonal, as well as the ideological domain while also developing reliable instruments that can be objectively scored (see Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1987).

The purpose of the present study was to explore the process of identity formation as related to adolescents' level of moral development, race, sex, and family configuration. This research is based on data from the third year of a six-year longitudinal study, the purpose of which is to investigate psychosocial and demographic factors associated with problem behaviors among adolescents.

A large body of empirical literature exists dealing with identity formation in adolescence as described by Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980). Wagner (1987) investigated the relationship between formal operational thinking and identity development in early, middle, and late adolescents, finding the two developmental phenomena to be relatively independent from the early teen years through adulthood. Using a similar sample, Protinsky and Wilkerson (1986) found a significant correlation between measures of ego identity and formal operations. Studies of the relationship between identity formation and moral development have been inconclusive, as well (see Weiss, 1984).

A number of authors have investigated behavioral and developmental characteristics of adolescents using identity status as a criterion variable. In a sample of undergraduate students, Bilsker and Marcia (1991) found that moratorium subjects were more open to

psychologically regressive experiences (e.g., fantasy) than were subjects of other statuses, and that identity achieved subjects were just as rigid as were foreclosures in their resistance to regressive experiences. The authors concluded that psychological regression is adaptive for the identity forming adolescent. Studying the link between parental identification and identity status in college students, Cella, DeWolfe, and Fitzgibbon (1987) found that identity diffused men identified with their fathers more strongly than diffused women did with their mothers, and that identity achieved men identified more strongly with their mothers than did men of other statuses. A study of high school students showed that identity achieved subjects were significantly lower on a measure of external locus of control than were students of other identity statuses, across sex and ethnicity (Abraham, 1983). Berzonsky and Neimeyer (1988) found the four identity statuses to be associated with different strategies of processing data relevant to self-theories in a sample of late-adolescent college students. A similar line of research using younger adolescents was conducted by Adams, Abraham, and Markstrom (1987). These authors found that adolescents with achievement status in ideological identity were significantly less self-conscious than were subjects of foreclosed, diffused, or moratorium status. Streitmatter (1989) investigated the relationship between identity status and academic achievement (attendance and test scores) in a large sample of middle school students. The author's prediction was that identity achieved and

foreclosed subjects would have higher levels of school achievement than would subjects of the other two statuses. The results were indecisive, however: foreclosed subjects were absent from school less often than were other students, but their scores were lower on tests of math and language.

Sex differences in identity formation have been investigated by several authors, with inconclusive results. In two studies of the same high school sample, it was found that although both males and females reached occupational identity achievement, males did so through accepting challenges while females' path to achievement status was closely linked to their interpersonal identity (Grotevant & Thorbecke, 1982; Thorbecke & Grotevant, 1982). Studying middle school students, Streitmatter (1988) found that females scored higher than males on measures of ideological and interpersonal achievement, and ideological moratorium. Fregeau and Barker (1986) reported finding female high school students higher than males on diffusion and moratorium, but not on identity achievement. Focusing on the relationship between sex role and ego identity in a large sample of high school students, Lamke and Peyton (1988) found that subjects classified as ideologically identity achieved had higher masculinity scores than did subjects of other statuses. On interpersonal identity status, however, achieved subjects were higher on both masculinity and femininity.

A number of authors have studied the relationship between race or ethnicity and adolescents' identity formation. In an urban

sample of 10th graders, Phinney (1988) found empirical evidence for three stages of ethnic identity development, and tentative support for a link between ethnic identity and ego identity, at least for minority adolescents. The author noted that white subjects generally did not have a specific ethnic identity beyond simply "American". Streitmatter (1988) examined the mediating effects of race/ethnicity on identity status in a large sample of 7th and 8th graders. Using identity status scores as dependent variables, the author found ethnic differences on ideological and interpersonal foreclosure, with white subjects being least foreclosed; and on moratorium status, with white males scoring lowest, and minority males scoring highest of all groups. Similarly, Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) concluded in a review of identity literature that the bulk of evidence points toward lower foreclosure scores for white adolescents, but noted that there are probably confounding effects of social class and family configuration in any effort to study identity formation. In a multi-ethnic sample of adolescents from the Southwest, Jones and Adams (1988) found that white subjects were more likely than other groups to be classified as identity achieved; that Mexican-Americans were most likely to be foreclosed and least likely to be diffused; and that Native Americans were most often diffused. Lamke and Peyton (1988), on the other hand, found no ethnic differences on ideological or interpersonal identity status in a large sample of Anglo- and

Mexican-American high school students. Few studies of identity status have focused on African-American adolescents.

There is a growing body of research in the area of family factors as related to the identity formation of adolescents. One line of investigation has dealt with possible links between identity and adolescents' attachment to their parents. In a sample of undergraduates, Quintana and Lapsley (1987) reported at most a weak relationship between the two factors. In contrast, Benson, Harris, and Rogers (1992) found that attachment to parents, especially the mother, was positively related to identity achievement status, and negatively related to diffusion; and that an intact parental marriage was positively related to both achievement and foreclosure. Benson et al. (1992) is one of the few studies that has included subjects from non-intact families (see also Protinsky, 1988). Individuation from the family has been linked with identity formation by Anderson and Fleming (1986), Bakken and Romig (1989), and Papini, Sebby, and Clark (1989), all of whom concluded that it is necessary for adolescents to perceive themselves as somewhat distant from their parents in order to engage in the exploration implicit in forming an achieved identity. The contradiction in findings in these two lines of research may be explained by results from Weinmann and Newcombe (1990) who found that late adolescents classified as having a committed identity (achieved or foreclosed) reported a resurgence of positive affect with their mothers more often than did subjects who were uncom-

mitted (moratorium or diffused). The authors concluded that having an identity reduced the threat to individuality that is implicit in intimate relationships. It is also interesting to note that Weinmann and Newcombe found no trends in the amount of reported affection for fathers in any identity status group.

Based on the foregoing review of the literature, it was expected in the present study that subjects from traditional (intact) and blended families would be most likely to be identity achieved; that females would score highest in the foreclosure and achievement statuses; and that there would be no difference in identity status between black and white subjects. It was further predicted that a positive association would be found between subjects' level of moral development and their scores on identity achievement and moratorium measures.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 288 students, the entire ninth-grade class, enrolled during the 1991-92 academic year, from a small southeastern town. One hundred eighty-five subjects were white, 100 were black, and 3 reported mixed ethnicity. For the purposes of all analyses reported here, race is divided into white (64.2%) and black (35.7%). The sample was evenly split between females

(49.65%) and males (50.35%). Eighty-seven of the students (30.9%) were classified as "low income" based on their qualifying for the school's free or reduced-price lunch program. All demographic data were obtained from school records.

Instruments

Family configuration. Students were asked to indicate on a checklist the relationship to subject and ages of all the persons currently living in their homes. One hundred thirty-six subjects (47.2%) reported living with both biological parents; 55 (19.1%) lived in single-parent homes, typically with the mother; 53 subjects (18.4%) were from blended families, defined as having a stepparent with or without children of his or her own; and 44 (15.4%) resided in extended families, which included various combinations of grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins.

Ego identity status. The Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status - Final Revision (EOMEIS-2), developed by Adams, Bennion and Huh (1987), was used to measure students' levels of identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. These four measures were used throughout the analyses as dependent variables. The EOMEIS-2 has been validated against Marcia's (1966) Identity Status Interview (Adams, Abraham & Markstrom, 1987; Grotevant & Adams, 1984), and for use with young adolescents (Jones & Streitmatter, 1987; Streitmatter, 1989).

Moral development. Students' level of moral development was assessed by the Sociomoral Reflection Objective Measure (SROM), a

paper and pencil questionnaire that has been shown to yield results congruent with Kohlberg's moral reasoning interview (see Gibbs, Widaman, & Colby, 1982)

Procedure

Data were collected by the authors and three undergraduate research assistants over a two-day period. Subjects were brought to the school library by their teachers during their regular social studies class period; groups ranged from one class (25 students) to three classes (70 students) in size. Written parental and subject consent was obtained by the school counselor during the previous week. On the first day of data collection, subjects completed the SROM and the family checklist. On the second day, students completed the EOMEIS-2 and an experience checklist which is not relevant to the present analyses. All instruments were deposited by the subjects through a slot in a sealed box, to insure their confidentiality. At the end of the second day's data collection, students were given the opportunity to ask any questions they might have had about the study. Classroom teachers did not participate in the data collection process, and were not in the room during that time.

Analyses

Because classifying students into identity statuses resulted in grossly unequal numbers in each of the ideological and interpersonal status groups (see Table 1), subjects' scores on each of the eight scales were used as dependent variables throughout the

analyses. Independent variables were subjects' sex, race, family configuration, and level of moral development.

Insert Table 1 about here

Preliminary Chi-square analyses showed no significant association between interpersonal identity formation (comprised of friendship, dating, sex roles and recreation) and any of the dependent variables. Ideological identity (subscales for occupation, religion, politics and philosophy) was found to be related to sex of subject, race of subject, and family configuration, and so became the focus of the main analysis. Moral development was found to be unrelated to any of the identity variables.

A 2(sex of subject) X 2(race of subject) X 4(family configuration) multivariate analysis of variance was performed, using the four identity status scores (identity achievement, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity diffusion) as dependent variables. Because no interactions were significant, the present discussion is limited to main effects and post hoc comparisons using Tukey's Studentized Range Test.

Results and Discussion

Significant sex differences were found on ideological moratorium with females scoring higher than males ($F\{5, 257\} = 6.57$, $p < .05$); and results approaching significance were found on ideological identity achievement, again with females scoring higher than males ($F\{5, 257\} = 3.75$, $p < .10$). These results add support to the notion of greater psychological maturity in young adolescent girls. One significant difference by race emerged from the data in that black subjects scored higher than whites on identity foreclosure ($F\{5, 257\} = 6.84$ $p < .01$). One explanation of this finding might be that this study's black adolescents, like their Mexican-American counterparts in previous research (see Streitmatter, 1988) have reacted to their situation as a large minority in a predominantly white school by conforming to the prescribed values and roles of their subculture, which is reflected in their relatively high foreclosure scores. The most unexpected result of the present analysis was the significant family effect on identity diffusion ($F\{5, 257\} = 3.07$, $p < .05$). Post hoc comparisons showed that this result was due to significantly higher diffusion scores for subjects from blended families as compared to those from traditional families.

Insert Table 2 about here

Previous findings from this sample have shown strong similarities between these two groups on other measures (see Manners & Smart, 1991, 1992). The present finding might be interpreted in the context of the adolescent family attachment literature (see Benson et al., 1992) in that the attachment of the adolescent to the mother, which has been shown to be related to identity achievement and foreclosure, might be disrupted temporarily by the mother's remarriage, the usual circumstance in blended families. In contrast, adolescents from single parent homes, most of which are headed by women, are able to maintain their attachment to their mothers, despite any other hardships the family might experience.

Adolescent identity formation is an area in which it is widely acknowledged that more ambitious research is necessary. In particular, there have been calls for longitudinal investigations (Jones, Hartmann, Grochowski, & Glider, 1989), and for cross-cultural studies (Phinney, 1988). As part of a longitudinal research design, the present findings will help plot the developmental trajectories of a cohort of racially mixed, small-town and rural adolescents, thus further illuminating the process of identity formation.

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Table 1

Frequency and Percent of Students by Identity Status: All Subjects

	Interpersonal		Ideological	
	N	%	N	%
Achieved	34	11.9	57	19.9
Foreclosed	18	6.3	14	4.9
Moratorium	15	5.2	10	3.5
Low Moratorium*	199	69.6	154	53.8
Diffused	20	7.0	51	17.8

*scores failed to reach cutoff on all statuses.

Table 2

Means of Ideological Identity Status Scores, By Subjects' Sex, Race and Family Configuration.

	Achieved	Foreclosed	Moratorium	Diffused
Sex of Subject				
Female	33.3	20.7	28.4[a]	24.3
Male	31.8	21.9	26.3[a]	24.7
Race of Subject				
Black	31.6	22.7[b]	27.9	24.9
White	33.1	20.5[b]	27.0	24.3
Family Configuration				
Traditional	32.5	21.5	26.9	23.3[c]
Single Parent	32.3	20.3	28.8	25.8
Blended	32.3	21.0	27.5	26.0[c]
Extended	32.4	21.7	26.3	24.7

Only means with same superscript are significantly different.